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ABSTRACT

This document consists of four quarterly issues of a newsletter for Illinois early childhood directors, providing information on current issues in early childhood education. Regular features in each issue include "The Director's Toolbox," delineating practical suggestions for directors related to program policies and staff issues; "Linking to Technology," on web sites of interest to program administrators and graduate level courses delivered online; "The Accreditation Corner," detailing procedures for self-evaluation related to accreditation; "Family Friendly Practices," describing early childhood programs especially involved in meeting families' needs; and "Director's Profile," highlighting the accomplishments of early childhood education or care program directors in Illinois. The Spring 1998 issue focuses on financing child care and early education programs. The Summer 1998 issue highlights how early childhood programs can help parents understand the importance of play for their young children and describes the Illinois Director Credential Project. The Fall 1998 issue discusses the job socialization of directors. The Winter 1998 issue focuses on providing staff development to better support the language development of infants and toddlers and provides information on further staff development opportunities. (KB)

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The Director's Link

Published by the Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National-Louis University **Spring, 1998**

ED 426 808

PS 027310

Financing Child Care and Early Education

by Teri Talan

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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Mary A. McEvoy

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

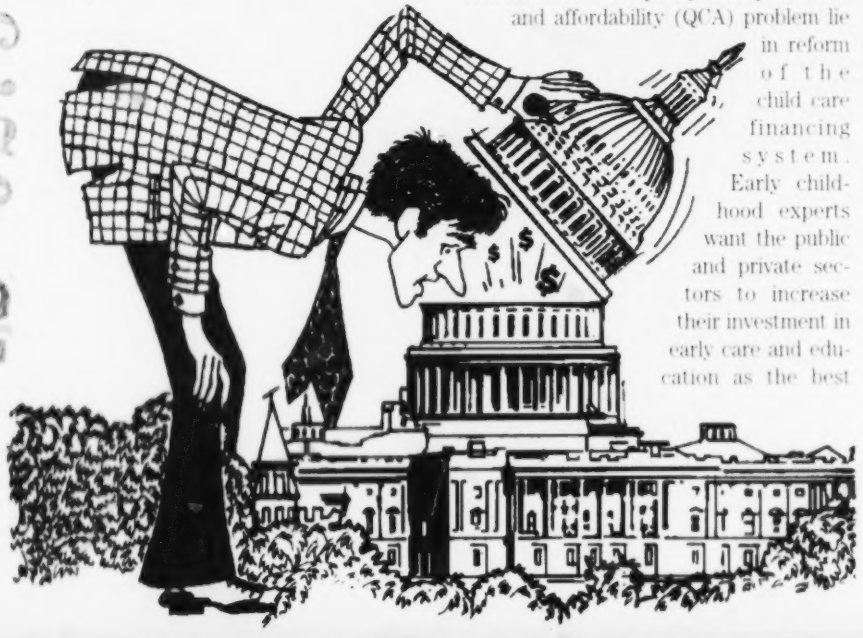
"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." These words, taken from *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, aptly describe the current state of affairs of financing early childhood programs in the United States. We, too, are in the midst of dramatic changes.

It was the worst of times...

This past year, federal, state, and local governments, parents, and the private sector spent over $40 billion to purchase or subsidize the cost of child care and early education for over 12 million children in America. Although this figure sounds awesome, it is not enough to adequately fund a system which can support the optimum cognitive and social development of children. The low level of child care funding is responsible for the current trilemma of child care: how do we provide quality services for children and adequate compensation for staff at a price parents can afford?

It was the best of times...

Solutions to the quality, compensation, and affordability (QCA) problem lie in reform of the child care financing system. Early childhood experts want the public and private sectors to increase their investment in early care and education as the best approach to reform. The good news is that policymakers are beginning to agree with child care advocates! While no single perfect strategy to solving the QCA problem has surfaced, there has at least been a meeting of the minds that it is important and necessary to accomplish this goal.



As early childhood educators, we value the development of children's divergent thinking. Finding answers to the QCA puzzle will also require such "out-of-the-box" thinking on the part of both policymakers and child care advocates. An opportunity for early childhood directors to think outside the box has just arrived.

The Illinois Department of Human Services has disseminated a market rate survey to all licensed child care providers in the state. It is essential that all directors respond with an accurate determination of the price of their programs whether or not their programs currently serve state-subsidized children.

One way for directors to accurately report the price of their programs is to be sure to calculate the per child value of all parent and program fundraising. For example, a program's reported price might include: the weekly fee charged to parents; the per week value of any registration, field trip, or transportation fees; and the per child, per week value of the program's annual United Way allocation or candy sale and other fundraising profits.

Child care reimbursement rates have a profound impact on the quality and range of child care options available to low-income families. Prior to the federal requirement that states base their child care reimbursement on data from market rate surveys, rates were often based on an arbitrary calculation by the state of what was "affordable."

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Linking to Technology

The Center for Early Childhood Leadership Launches New Web Site

Directors, aspiring directors, and other educators who have an interest in issues relating to the administration of early childhood programs are encouraged to log on to the Center for Early Childhood Leadership's new web site (http://www.ni.edu/cecl). The site is divided into five main areas: About the Center, Training, Technical Assistance, Research, and Public Awareness. Each area differs in what it has to offer the browser.

Those who are unfamiliar with the purpose and mission of the Center will find **About the Center** informative. This section provides a detailed history of the Center and background information on its funders, faculty and staff, and advisory board.

The **Training** area includes up-to-date information on workshops, institutes, and degree programs for early childhood administrators. In the **Technical Assistance** area, directors will find a discussion forum titled *Time Out* where they can connect with other directors from around the country to discuss issues relating to program administration and professional development. In the Technical Assistance window, directors can also find out how to conduct an organizational climate assessment of their programs using the *Early Childhood Work Environment Survey*.

Information on recent studies conducted by the Center and research articles relating to directors' professional development can be found in the **Research** section of the web site. The **Public Awareness** section contains current and past articles from the *Director's Link*, an update on activities relating to the Illinois Director Credential, and recent press releases from the Center. This section will also post employment opportunities for directors.

The development of our web site has been funded by grants from the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation and the American Business Collaboration for Quality Dependent Care (ABC). It marks an important step in our expanding array of services for center directors.

Don't delay, visit us today!

Taking the Leap into Cyberspace... A Director Reflects

Linda Bridgman, YWCA of Aurora

During the *Taking Charge of Change* leadership training I attended at National-Louis University two years ago, we were told that directors in child care deserved the newest and best tools to do their jobs. That comment really opened my mind. The support and encouragement I got to use the computer allowed me to explore the possibilities of the Internet. In the first year I e-mailed colleagues, registered on-line for the annual NAEYC conference, downloaded information on "best practices" and room arrangements for classrooms, and explored chat rooms on parent education.

I use the Internet daily now in both my professional and personal life. In my work for the Child and Adult Care Food Program, I send my claim to the state once a month. After three days, I check the state comptroller's office to see if the payment has been processed. The comptroller electronically transfers the money to our bank. This allows me to reimburse the child care providers 5 to 10 days quicker than the old system of check writing, mailing, depositing, and waiting for the check to clear.

I also use the Internet to keep up with the latest in the field of early childhood. At the recent Fox Valley AEYC Annual Conference I presented a workshop on the implications of brain research on early childhood programming. Much of the information I used I had obtained from various web sites.

My use of the Internet is not limited to work! My daughter, a student at Illinois State University, and I touch base with each other everyday.

So, thanks again for introducing me to the Internet and the support I received as I struggled to learn new concepts. I want you to know how grateful I am for being able to be on the cutting edge of technology!

Lindacacfp@juno.com

Continued from front page

In many parts of Illinois, reimbursement rates are far below the fees paid by non-subsidized families. This has frequently resulted in a two-tiered system of early care and education, one serving low-income children and one serving more affluent children.

We now have the opportunity to assist the state in setting reimbursement rates that more accurately approach the market cost of child care. Why is this so important? Increased rates would support true parental choice, provide low-income children with access to high quality programs with more comprehensive services, and help a wide range of providers to serve all children in need of quality care and education.

When you receive the market rate survey to complete, spend the time to accurately determine the market costs for your center — you will get a good return on your investment.

For further reading:

Behrman, R. E. (Ed.). (1996). The future of children: Financing child care. Los Altos, CA: The Center for the Future of Children, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

Willer, B. (Ed.). (1990). Reaching the full cost of quality in early childhood programs. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Did You Know?

...these facts about American children

1 in 2 will live with a single parent during some point in childhood

1 in 4 is born to a mother who did not graduate from high school

1 in 7 has no health insurance

Source: Children's Defense Fund, The State of America's Children 1997 Yearbook

The Director's Toolbox

Rules for Effective Fee Policies

It's a difficult balancing act, setting fees high enough to adequately reward staff and low enough to be affordable to families. It's no less difficult setting fee policies that are flexible enough to meet the needs of parents under stress, yet tough enough to protect the center from financial hardship. Here are seven tips for writing effective fee policies.

1. **Don't sell yourself short.**

The fees you charge should be based on what it costs to provide a level of quality you can believe in. If you set your fees to be in line with what other centers in your community charge, you may or may not be setting them high enough to cover your costs. If you keep your fees low because you fear that parents may not be able to afford higher fees, you are resigning your center to a mediocre level of quality. Rather, you should set your fees based on what quality care costs and then work hard to find ways to offer scholarships and discounts for families who truly can't afford your program.

2. **Don't set policies you won't enforce.**

It is easy to write tough policies to deal with all your problems. However, policies accomplish their purpose only if they are enforced by real people in real life. The cleverest late pick-up policy is worthless if you lack the commitment to enforce it, or if you only enforce it intermittently.

3. **No small print, no surprises.**

Parents won't be influenced by policies they aren't aware of. At intake, carefully review in person your key policies on withdrawals, absences, late pick-ups, and late payments so that parents clearly know in advance what the rules are. Many centers require that parents sign a statement or contract agreeing to these policies.

4. **Watch the tone.**

In writing policies it is natural to slip into a negative, legalistic tone. This often leads to policies that are far from family friendly. State your policies in straightforward, nonjudgmental fashion. Don't lecture or moralize.

5. **Write policies well.**

Keep your statements clear and precise, without misspellings and grammatical errors, and simple to understand.

6. **Attend to presentation.**

Just as a delicious dinner can be diminished with lousy presentation, the best policies can be undermined if poorly presented. Pay attention to the details of layout and design.

7. **Help parents find help.**

Include advice to parents on how to qualify for public subsidies. Inform parents on how they can save money with the federal child care tax credit. Make your policies useful tools for parents as well as for your center.

Adapted from: Neugebauer, R. (1993, November). State-of-the-art thinking on fee policies. Reprinted with permission from Child Care Information Exchange, P.O. Box 2890, Redmond, WA 98073, 1-800-221-2864.

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Planning Ahead

Advocacy Institute—May 2, 1998
The Child Care Director as Advocate

Early Childhood directors play a key leadership role in advocating for quality services for children and families. This Advocacy Institute will provide an overview of current legislative and advocacy issues confronting directors and suggest ways they can lobby for change.

Featured speakers include: Jerry Stermer, President, Voices for Illinois Children; Elissa Bassler, Director of Public Policy, Day Care Action Council; Tom Layman, Executive Director of North Avenue Day Nursery; Teri Talan, Director, Evanston Day Nursery and NLU adjunct instructor; and Carol Dellahousaye, Advocate, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

The registration fee is $25.00. It includes continental breakfast, workshop sessions, and lunch. To register, send your $25 registration fee to Eileen Eisenberg, Training Coordinator, The Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National-Louis University 1000 Capitol Drive, Wheeling, Illinois 60090 along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Please make checks payable to National-Louis University.

Individuals may register for 2 semester hours of non-resident graduate credit (ECE-536) by attending additional sessions on Saturday evening, May 2, Sunday morning, May 3, and a weekend in October. Tuition is $250 for this course and is applicable toward NLU's master's degree in Early Childhood Administration.

Saturday, May 2, 1998
8:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Lisle/Naperville Hilton
3003 Corporate West Drive
Lisle, Illinois, 630-505-0900

Keeping Informed

Illinois Director Credential Project Seeks Participants

by Valerie Dawkins

The arrival of the new millennium will be marked by important events and celebrations across the country. Here in Illinois, the date January 2000 has special significance for early childhood administrators —it is the target start-up date for an Illinois Director Credential (IDC).

The Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) (the oversight agency for the project) is working with a 10-member Management Committee and has hired a Project Coordinator to oversee the development of the credential. Four work groups have been established and an official kick-off event is scheduled for this spring.

The Illinois Director Credential Project is premised on the belief that the center director is the driving force behind an early childhood program. The director's ability to manage finances, staff, children, and curriculum effectively determines the success of a program. As leader, the director has the most influence and greatest opportunity to impact the quality of a program, thereby enhancing the lives of children and their families. It is the goal of this project to develop a credential that meets the professional development needs of directors and is accessible to all directors in the state.

The project is currently seeking input from directors and other early childhood specialists across the state to serve as advisory group members, work group members, and as reviewers of materials and processes. Work groups have been designed to address the areas identified at the Illinois Director Credential Symposium held in April 1997. The four Work Groups are: Competencies; Systems; Accessibility and Affordability; and Public Relations and Marketing.

A Management Committee, consisting of ten early childhood professionals, will serve as a consulting body for the project. Members include Paula Jorde Bloom, Shirley Morgenthaler, Carol Neuhauser, Eva Serrano, Kimberly Peckwas Strzelczyk, Teri Talan, Brazilian Thurman, Kimberly Williams, Audrey Witzman, and Cass Wolfe.

The Illinois Director Credential Project is funded by the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation. If you are interested in learning more about how you might participate in the development of an Illinois Director Credential, call Valerie Dawkins, IDC Project Coordinator, INCCRRA, at 618-244-9036.

The Director's Link is distributed free of charge to early childhood directors in Illinois. If you have received more than one copy of this newsletter, please pass it along to a colleague. Address corrections should be directed to:

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The Accreditation Corner

Using the Early Childhood Classroom Observation Booklet

The accreditation self-study materials that relate to classroom quality and children's daily experiences can be found in the Early Childhood Classroom Observation Booklet. The criteria in this booklet are divided into five sections: interactions among staff and children, curriculum, physical environment, health and safety, and nutrition. Each criterion is clearly written in simple, direct statements. Specific indicators to help you achieve the criteria are also suggested.

If you have gone through a CDA credential course of study or have taken undergraduate early childhood course work, you will find that the topics covered in the 20-page Classroom Observation Booklet are similar in scope and focus.

For some teachers, reading the criteria presented for high quality classroom practices provides a review for what they are currently doing; for others, it presents a new way of looking at their work with young children. In either instance, careful use of the Early Childhood Classroom Observation Booklet provides a solid foundation for teachers and directors as they begin to examine teaching practices at their centers.

Practical steps for using the booklet

1. Make copies of the booklets for staff to use as a study guide. Distribute the copies and ask the teachers to read the first section prior to coming to a staff meeting. Don't expect to complete a review of the first section of 15 criteria at a typical two-hour meeting. Each criterion is worthy of a lengthy discussion to assess teachers' understanding of the criterion, their agreement or disagreement with the statements presented, and their perceived understanding of how the criterion is reflected in their daily teaching practice.
2. Have teachers observe one another in the classroom using the booklet as a guide. This means that a substitute must be called in to take over for the teacher (or assistant teacher) who is doing the observing. A staff member cannot observe, complete the booklet, and be attentive to the needs of young children at the same time. Observations should take between 1½ to 2 hours.
3. You or your assistant director should also observe in each classroom and complete a practice booklet for each classroom.
4. Hold a classroom team meeting for each group of observed children and compare your recorded ratings with those of the teachers. Identifying strengths is a positive way to initiate these conversations. Providing a non-threatening forum to discuss weaknesses is crucial to building partnerships with staff. Differences in the interpretation of what has been observed can become a springboard for further discussion. Remember to refer to NAEYC's book Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs for clarification of any criteria.
5. Together you and your teachers and assistant teachers should develop a training plan to address the issues that surfaced during the classroom team meetings. For example, this might include ways to extend children's language or expand the use of multicultural materials in the classroom.
6. Review these observations periodically as you proceed through the self-study process. When you and your teachers are satisfied that the teaching practices in the classrooms meet the standards for high quality, have each classroom team complete one Early Childhood Classroom Observation Booklet for each group of children served. (In half-day preschool programs where the same team of teachers has a morning class and an afternoon class, two booklets must be completed.) Instructions for using the rating scale are clearly stated in each booklet.

Family Friendly Practices

Burr Ridge YMCA

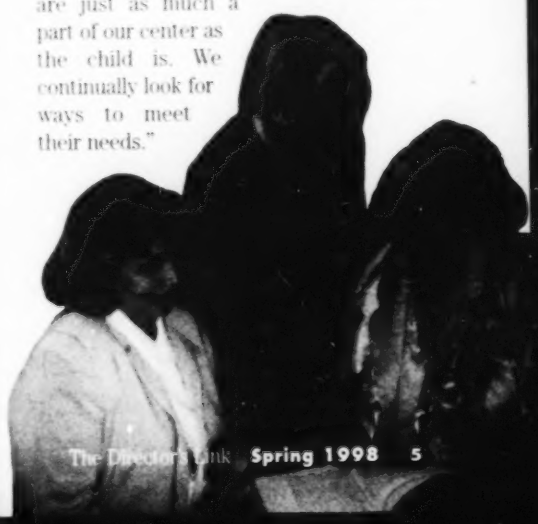
Located in the southeast corner of DuPage County, the Burr Ridge YMCA was built two years ago through the generous support of John Nerad, founder and President of TimeMed Labeling Systems. Mr. Nerad credits the time he spent in YMCA programs as a youth as fostering the leadership skills that made him a successful businessman.

Diane Smith, Director of Early Childhood Programs for the Burr Ridge YMCA, believes that being "family friendly" is really a state of mind. It is most evident in the manner in which staff communicate with parents. "Talking with parents with respect and courtesy is a number one priority for our staff," states Diane. "We try to put ourselves in a parent's shoes, to look at each situation from the parent's perspective." Just because parents might be late picking up their children on occasion or may forget to send boots on a rainy day does not necessarily mean the parent is negligent.

Being family friendly also means developing policies and procedures that are firm yet flexible. "For example," says Diane, "we have made tuition readjustments for parents who go on vacation with their children and for children who become sick and remain home for an extended time."

Diane also believes that providing special services for parents is another way the center can demonstrate its commitment to family friendly practices. At the Burr Ridge YMCA, parents can drop off their dry-cleaning, get their child's hair cut, or enroll their child in tumbling and dance classes.

Diane's educational philosophy is evident when she speaks, "We believe that parents are just as much a part of our center as the child is. We continually look for ways to meet their needs."



Director's Profile

Tom Layman Promoting Collaboration for Quality Child Care Services

Tom Layman has been the Executive Director of North Avenue Day Nursery (NADN) since 1977. Located in the West Town neighborhood of Chicago since 1908, NADN was established as a social service agency. Currently it serves 95 preschoolers and 39 school-agers. It also supports 24 children in 7 day care homes.

Tom describes North Avenue as a strong community-based agency with a dedicated board of directors. Staff at North Avenue are deeply committed and the center has experienced very little turnover. North Avenue Day Nursery achieved NAEYC accreditation in 1997.

Tom's expertise and energies outside his center have focused on legislative advocacy, building community alliances, and agency fundraising. He serves as co-chair of the advocacy committee for the Day Care Action Council and chairman of the Illinois Alliance for Quality Early Childhood Settings. He is also a member of the Kohl/McCormick Early Childhood Teaching Awards Selection Committee.

Tom's activities with the Day Care Action Council currently include working on a campaign to secure higher subsidized child care rates. He has developed a tool for directors of centers to help relate the cost of care and potential income to the fee that is charged for service.

Tom understands firsthand the dilemma that directors face as they try to set tuition rates that are high enough to cover operational costs yet are still affordable for families. He advocates developing a system for analyzing costs against income and establishing prices for services along with developing financial aid strategies. "We need to help child care centers and child care homes develop more sophisticated business practices that support the ultimate goal of providing better quality services."

Through his work at the Day Care Action Council, Tom meets with administrators from the Chicago Public Schools, representatives from the State Board of Education, and Illinois legislators to advocate for increased funding and the promotion of partnerships of state pre-kindergarten programs and child care programs. "The state pre-kindergarten program enrolling at-risk children is a model that provides seamless services to children combining care and education throughout the day. Children do not have to change settings or teachers. This reduces their stress and aids their cognitive development."

Tom is excited about a new partnership North Avenue Day Nursery has created with a community group in the West Haven neighborhood (the Henry Horner housing project). Together they are developing a network of child care homes within a newly constructed mixed-income community.

Tom began his career in the 60s "when people were thinking about social justice and change." He met his wife, Sharon, at Onward House where he organized after-school and summer camp programs. "I got involved in advocacy because I saw that many of the problems the field faces cannot be effectively addressed until the subsidized child care and educational systems begin working together to secure more funding."

Tom was a recipient of a McCormick Fellowship and received his M.Ed. in Early Childhood Leadership and Advocacy from National-Louis University.

Tom and Sharon have three sons, Matthew, Daniel, and Micah. Although Sharon's background is in education, she currently owns a landscaping and gardening business in Oak Park. The family enjoys camping and visiting Sharon's family in Newfoundland.

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The Director's Link

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Helping Parents Understand the Power of Play

By Michael K. Meyerhoff, Ed.D.

PS 027310

"How can my child be getting an adequate preparation for school when all she does is play?" This is a frequent question from parents of preschoolers—and one that is difficult for directors to answer. It is clear that young children who explore, investigate, and experiment through play build strong foundations in every important area of development — including intelligence, language, social competence, emotional security, and self-esteem. It also is clear that exposing them to rigid academic training too soon is counterproductive to long-term educational development.

Unfortunately, these notions are not easily grasped by many parents. They fear a child who engages in pleasurable, self-initiated, and self-directed activities will be "missing out" on learning opportunities and will "fall behind" peers who are enrolled in a more structured program that emphasizes the early acquisition of "scholastic" skills. How can a director convince a skeptical parent there is plenty of power in play? Although there is no sure-fire solution to this problem, the following strategies are usually quite effective.

Explain the concept of educational foundations. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to recognizing the power of play is the refrigerator door. Parents like to see hard evidence of educational progress—something they can hang on the Frigidaire with magnetic fruit. Programs that emphasize the early acquisition of scholastic skills provide them with a multitude of "worksheets" full of letters, numbers, shapes, and colors they can point to as "proof" their child has learned something significant.

Therefore, it is critical to indicate that such evidence can actually be superficial and misleading. For example, a three-year-old who recites the alphabet as a result of rigorous drills and rote memorization may appear to have acquired an important "pre-reading" skill. But if you talk to him, you discover all he really has done is learn a little song. He thinks "elemeno" ("L-M-N-O") is one letter, and he thinks that N comes between Y and Z ("W,X,Y 'n Z").

Meanwhile, a child who has spent a lot of time playing with Lego blocks probably has had a more meaningful educational experience. By putting the individual pieces together to form a variety of interesting structures, he has developed the basic problem-solving skills that will enable him to easily comprehend word and sentence structure later on. And by noting how a particular piece serves different functions depending on how and where it is placed in different structures, he has developed the basic discriminatory skills that will enable him to deal effectively with capitalization, special letter combinations (such as the, ph, wh, sh), and other oddities of written language.

In other words, since these fundamental abilities are less tangible and not immediately apparent to the parental eye, it is necessary to demonstrate that promoting optimal educational development through play is like building a house. You can't be concerned about the roofing tiles and aluminum siding until you've poured the concrete and erected the steel frame. Focusing on external trimmings at the expense of internal supports may produce a house that looks pretty for a little while, but no one will want to live in it for very long.

Emphasize the importance of a child's physical, social, and emotional development. When it comes to ensuring their children's success,

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Continued from front page

parents sometimes suffer from tunnel vision and equate "education" exclusively with cognitive and linguistic activities. Consequently, it must be mentioned that young children are not yet "intellectual" creatures. If a new mental challenge is not presented within a familiar sensory and motor context, they will have trouble relating to it and will not learn much from it.

Furthermore, it is imperative to point out that success in school—and life—requires more than intellectual prowess. Without a solid sense of security, a strong self-image, and superb interpersonal skills, a child may develop into "the brightest" but it is highly unlikely she will develop into "the best." Because play permits young children to interact with their peers as "companions" instead of competitors and allows them to acquire new capacities at their own pace and in their own way, it provides the finest opportunity for young children to realize their *full* potential.

Provide resources from other authoritative sources. When a director informs well-meaning parents they may be doing something contrary to their children's well-being, parents will often react angrily and personally—no matter how polite and tactful a director may be. Even if a director has impeccable credentials and a wealth of experience, anxious parents may be reluctant to just take her word for it. While parents may readily dismiss the opinions of the person who confronts them, they are less likely to dismiss the results of published research.

Providing parents with articles from professional journals and newsletters can be an effective tool for helping them to understand the importance of play in a child's development. The Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Young Children, Child Care Information Exchange, High/Scope ReSource, and Early Education and Development are excellent resources for articles extolling the power of play in young children's development.

Providing parents with articles from professional journals and magazines also gives them the opportunity to absorb and consider the information at their own pace. Remember, changing people's attitudes is a slow process that begins with knowledge and information. When directors seize every opportunity they have to share resources with parents, they are building powerful allies for developmentally appropriate practices based on engaging, play-based experiences.

Michael K. Meyerhoff, Ed.D., a former researcher with the Harvard Preschool Project, is Executive Director of The Epicenter Inc., "The Education for Parenthood Information Center". He has prepared a small booklet entitled The Power of Play: A Discussion about Early Childhood Education, to help parents of young children understand these important issues. A sample copy may be obtained by sending a stamped self-addressed #10 envelope to: The Epicenter Inc., 452 Crooked Lake Lane, Lindenhurst, IL 60046.

Keeping Informed

"Piecing the Puzzle" Illinois Director Credential Project Launched

Over 100 early childhood leaders from across the state gathered in Joliet on May 15, 1998 to celebrate and begin the work of putting together the pieces of an Illinois Director Credential. Focusing on the director as the key to quality, the statewide initiative will result in a voluntary credential for center-based early care and education program directors in Illinois, beginning in the year 2000.

United States Senator Richard Durbin addressed the early childhood professionals, representatives of higher education, government officials, and members of the philanthropic community who attended the launch event at the Renaissance Center at Joliet Junior College. The senator's message focused on the individual and social good of early childhood education and its importance in every aspect of American life.

The Illinois Director Credential Project is committed to developing a credential that will meet the needs of the full array of center directors and aspiring directors across Illinois. Each of the Project's four work groups has members representing the diversity of programs, children, and families in Illinois.

Individuals who wish to participate in the process may do so by contacting the Project Coordinator, Valerie Dawkins at the INCCRRA Office in Bloomington (309/829-5127).

Grant$ Update

The Center Receives Grant for Technology Training

The Center for Early Childhood Leadership has received an $88,000 grant from the American Business Collaboration for Quality Dependent Care (ABC) to support directors in their efforts to integrate technology into the fabric of center operations. Each of the 13 participating directors will receive a laptop computer, printer, software, Internet access, and 32 hours of instruction in the use of technology in child care administration. The ABC grant is administered by Work/Family Directions of Boston. Contributing corporations were: IBM Corporation, Price Waterhouse, Bank of America, and Deloitte & Touche.

The Director's Toolbox

Tips for More Effective Meetings

Directors of early care and education programs rely on staff meetings as the primary vehicle for communicating information, making decisions, and creating team spirit. If meetings are to be effective, though, all staff must see themselves as sharing responsibility for creating a climate that is conducive to getting the work done. Developing a code of conduct for how meetings should be run is one way to build understanding about desired meeting processes. A code of conduct describes how people want to relate to each other. It needs to be drafted, discussed, and agreed upon by all. Most important, it should be reviewed often, preferably at the beginning of each meeting. Here is an example of what a code of conduct might look like:

Happy Valley Preschool

Code of Conduct for Staff Meetings

We will strive to...

1. be punctual, respect time limits for agenda items, and stay for the entire meeting.
2. communicate openly and directly.
3. be courteous, listen attentively, and be respectful of different points of view.
4. participate fully and not engage in sideline conversations or distracting behaviors.
5. be flexible and open to change.
6. stay on task and not divert attention to other unrelated topics.
7. assume positive intentions by others.
8. focus on opportunities and possibilities, not dwell on roadblocks and excuses.
9. strive for consensus in decision making; if an impasse is reached, a simple majority vote will be used.
10. make decisions based on what is best for children and families, not what is expedient or easy.

Linking to Technology

Take Some Time Out

Directing an early childhood program is a difficult and exhausting job. All directors need an occasional "time out" to reflect and nurture their own professional development. Our web site discussion forum, *Time Out*, provides a place for you to share issues and concerns with one another, trade resources, and get feedback on questions you may have about program administration.

To access the discussion forum, go to our web site at **www.nl.edu/cecl** and then click on the **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE** button on the side bar. From there, click ***TIME OUT***. Once you are in the *Time Out* discussion forum, locate the section labeled **DISCUSSION TOPICS**. Each one of the topics currently available for discussion will appear highlighted and underlined. To enter into a specific topic, click onto this highlighted and underlined text. The discussion forum will then bring you to the page where the topic is described in detail.

You can view what others have written by clicking onto the highlighted and underlined text next to each person's name. If you would like to add a message to a particular topic, locate the **NEW** button directly below the section with the detailed topic description and click it. This will bring you to a page with an empty form for you to complete.

Make sure you fill in all of the boxes on the page including the window where you enter your actual message. To erase the page and start over, click the **RESET MESSAGE** button at the bottom of the page. Once you are ready to post your message, click the **PREVIEW MESSAGE** button also located at the bottom of the page. This will display what your message will look like posted in the *Time Out* discussion forum. If you are satisfied with your message, click the **POST MESSAGE** button at the bottom of the page. If not, click onto **EDIT SOME MORE**. Have fun.

Research in Review

New Study Confirms Need for Improved Training and Compensation for Teachers

In 1997, the Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW) conducted a follow-up to their landmark 1988 study of child care centers in five metropolitan areas: Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, Phoenix, and Seattle. Findings from the two studies offer insight into the characteristics and stability of the child care workforce.

Results of the 1997 study, Worthy Work, Unlivable Wages, confirm previous concerns about the instability of the child care workforce, the mediocre quality of center-based care available to young children, and the detrimental impact of these conditions on young children's development.

Job conditions in the profession remain substandard. Wages have stagnated at a near-poverty level, despite above-average levels of education. Figure 1 compares the wages of child care teachers with other workers in the civilian labor force. Wages have stagnated at a near-poverty level, despite above-average levels of education.

The CCW study found that the lowest-paid child care teachers earn an average of $7.50 per hour or $13,125 per year. Wages for the highest-paid teachers average $10.85 per hour or $18,988 per year — a very modest raise over the past decade of approximately $1.32 per hour.

Salaries are in large part a reflection of the training requirements for different occupations. Voices for Illinois Children reports that fully 81% of Illinois centers employ child care teachers who exceed the basic education and training requirements required by DCFS. Training requirements for child care teachers are woefully inadequate. Figure 2 compares the training required for child care teachers with that of barbers and nail technicians.

Child care centers, as a whole, continue to report high levels of job turnover and difficulty attracting and retaining qualified teaching staff. The situation leads to problems of inconsistent care, understaffing, and the potential for unsafe conditions for children.

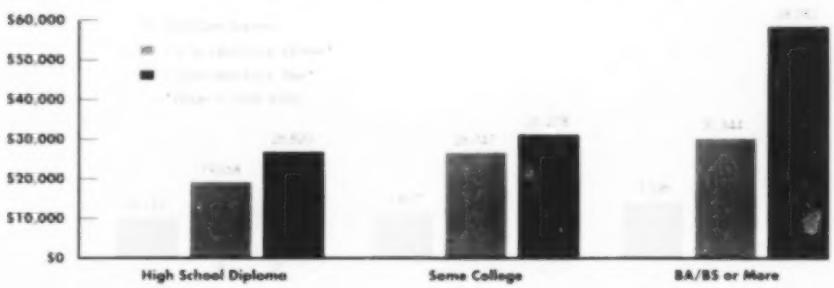
In the CCW sample, 27% of child care teachers and 38% of assistant teachers left their jobs during the previous year — an average turnover rate of 31% for all staff. One-fifth of centers reported losing half or more of their teaching staff during the previous year.

The study also found that centers that are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) tend to pay higher wages to teaching staff, report lower rates of teacher turnover, and are better able to retain qualified staff.

The CCW report recommends an increase in public funds for child care that are targeted to quality and compensation; stronger linkages between training and financial rewards for child care staff; and increased reimbursement rates to bring public subsidy of child care centers in line with the true cost of providing quality care. CCW further recommends that all centers that receive public funds be required to demonstrate a commitment to improving the education, training, financial rewards, and job stability of their teaching and administrative staff — the key element of program quality.

Figure 1

Annual Wages of Child Care Teachers Versus Other Workers in the Labor Force



Source: The Center for the Child Care Workforce

The Director's Link is distributed free of charge to early childhood directors in Illinois. If you have received more than one copy of this newsletter, please pass it along to a colleague. Address corrections should be directed to:

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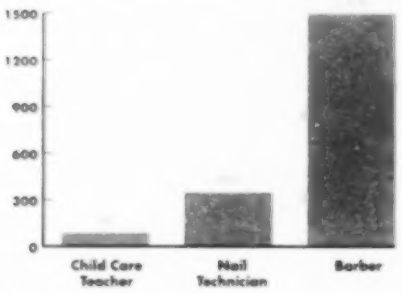
Required Hours of Training in Illinois



Source: Voices for Illinois Children, Illinois Kids Count 1997-1998

For additional information on this topic contact:

- Center for the Child Care Workforce 202-737-7700
- Voices for Illinois Children 312-456-0600

The Accreditation Corner

First Impressions—A Checklist

The summer is a good time to take a critical look at the classrooms in your center. Think about the power of first impressions that visitors (and accreditation validators) get from the physical environment. Whether you are thinking about beginning the self-study phase of NAEYC accreditation, have already begun the process, or are preparing for a validation visit, review the following checklist with your staff.

Overall appearance:

- ✔ clean carpets.
- ✔ washed windows.
- ✔ clean window treatments.
- ✔ washed and repaired classroom furniture.
- ✔ current, professional, and uncluttered bulletin board for staff.
- ✔ current, friendly, and uncluttered bulletin board for parents (multilingual, if necessary).
- ✔ places to hang children's artwork at their eye level.
- ✔ places for children to create birthday, attendance, helper charts/boards.
- ✔ framed photograph of each teacher posted outside each classroom with a short descriptive statement. For example: *My name is Trisha Jones. I received my AA degree from Oakton Community College. I love to cook, play volleyball, and listen to jazz.*

Learning centers:

- ✔ Block area: small and large blocks, wheeled vehicles, road signs, people and animals, access to the dress-up area.
- ✔ Art area:easels with paint; containers holding things to paint with including brushes, sponges, tooth brushes, Q-tips, cotton balls; collage containers holding colored papers, tissue, foil, magazines, wallpaper, fabric squares, glue and scissors; containers holding things to draw with including chalk, crayons, and markers; playdough and clay.
- ✔ Reading area: a quiet space with soft surfaces that has easy access to reading materials: books that are in good condition, children's magazines, the daily newspaper, special Sunday magazine supplements; flyers from the local grocery store, class photo albums.
- ✔ Literacy area: a writing area with pencils, papers, scissors, tape, paper clips, rubber bands, envelopes, staplers, calculator, telephone, ruler, computer and printer.
- ✔ Housekeeping area: washable dolls and doll blankets, kitchen appliances (stove, refrigerator) table and chairs, cooking and eating utensils, real food boxes (emptied and stuffed with newspaper, to retain their shape), dress-up clothes and shoes, jewelry, mirrors, doll buggy and shopping cart, broom and dust pan. Shelving with cash registers, telephones. Once a month this area can be transformed into a grocery store barber shop, restaurant, dentist office, etc.
- ✔ Music area: cassette player or phonograph, musical instruments accessible to the children, enough space for creative movement, access to the dress-up area.

Other areas:

- ✔ Science materials located throughout the room: plants, fish and/or a small animal at the child's eye level, magnets, hammers and nails, screwdrivers and things to take apart; old eye glasses, dental impressions, x-rays, stethoscope, magnifying glasses, rocks and sea shells, evidence of recent classroom experiments.
- ✔ Water and sand tables: things for pouring and digging.
- ✔ Shelving with puzzles, legos, stringing beads, board games.
- ✔ Places for additional push and pull toys.
- ✔ Containers for balls and bean bags.
- ✔ Cubbies labeled with each child's name and photograph.
- ✔ Toy shelves and toy containers clearly labeled (with pictures and descriptive words in several languages, if necessary).

First impressions send powerful messages about the quality of your program. Take a fresh look at the physical environment of your center today.

Family Friendly Practices

Woodstock Early Learning Center

Woodstock Early Learning Center is located just a few blocks from the town square where the movie Ground Hog Day was filmed. The Center is a part of Woodstock Christian Life Services Corporation which has been helping families in McHenry County for more than 100 years. Other services provided by Christian Life Services include a senior retirement community and a nursing home.

Woodstock Early Learning Center serves 150 children, infants to 12 years of age in full day and after-school programs. "Being a part of Christian Life Services, the center has the unique opportunity to support intergenerational programs," says Mona Arend, Director.

Each week a variety of intergenerational activities are scheduled with senior adults including show and tell, singing, exercise sessions, game time, and reading. Each class makes and delivers monthly birthday cards to the seniors. Holidays are also shared with the seniors. For example, children passed out carnations on the first day of Spring and held a costume parade at Halloween. "Our future plans are to build a wheel chair-accessible garden, where seniors and children can enjoy the outdoors together."

Creating partnerships with parents is an integral part of the philosophy of Woodstock Early Learning Center. "The lobby to our center reflects our commitment to positive communication with families," states Mona. Placed next to a welcoming love seat is the parent lending library, a parent desk with albums of center pictures, a parent news board, current articles on parenting, and a communication box for baby sitting or home business opportunities. There is also a place for exchanging outgrown children's clothes.

This past year, the staff at Woodstock Early Learning Center compiled a booklet describing the Center's philosophy and curriculum. Teachers researched and wrote the chapters: Role of the child; role of the teacher; role of the family; the environment; daily schedule; anti-bias curriculum; aesthetic expression; fine and gross motor activities; language arts and literature; math and science. Initially written as a guide for the staff, the teachers decided to extend the distribution of the booklet to parents in the center. Mona reflects, "This has turned out to be a terrific way to unite families and staff toward shared goals."

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Director's Profile

Jill Moore Sustaining Quality in a Private Child Care Center

Jill Moore is the owner and director of Early Learning in Champaign, Illinois. Located in a residential neighborhood near the University of Illinois campus, Early Learning serves 76 children with a staff of 12. This exemplary center provides a wonderful example of how high quality can be achieved in the for-profit sector of early care and education.

In 1976, after completing a masters' degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Illinois, Jill purchased a private residence and converted it into her dream — Early Learning. "At that time most programs were custodial in nature. The community questioned whether we were day care or a preschool. Through our sustained commitment to quality programming we have gained the respect of a generation of families — over 2000 children have been enrolled in the program."

Jill states, "I wake up each day and look forward to going to work — I love the variety and the change. I have made my position grow and change from year to year either by design or by necessity."

"Meeting the costs of providing high quality care has not been easy. The profit margin is very slim," says Jill. Twenty-five percent of the children enrolled in Early Learning are subsidized by the Department of Human Services and those subsidies pay only 66% of the total cost of care. Jill states, "Providing anything beyond basic needs requires outside funding. Quality enhancement grants are a necessity for a privately-owned day care center to supplement tuition income. Funding for capital improvements has come from child care and development block grants."

During Early Learning's 22-year history, the facility has been expanded and remodeled several times. One of the highlights of a visit to Early Learning is watching children play in their outdoor playscape. All of the classrooms open onto a deck that was designed to be a dry place for children to play when the ground is wet. This deck also provides access to the backyard on sunny days. A tree house, tunnel, slides, swings, basketball net, herb and flower gardens, and small hills covered with carpet squares provide ample room for both children and their rabbit friends to explore, experiment, and enjoy outdoor play.

Jill is an NAEYC accreditation validator and remains a strong proponent for accreditation for Early Learning. Early Learning was first accredited by NAEYC in 1987, the 17th program in Illinois to achieve that honor. "We have been through the self-study four times. Each time it has been different. Reaccreditation helps us to formally review our policies and procedures. We continually stretch to new challenges and keep current with new developments in the field."

Jill's goals for the center reflect the changing views within the early childhood community including diversity within the classroom, full inclusion of children with special needs, and increased after-school programs.

Jill's commitment to the field extends beyond her own program. She serves as a mentor for the Center for Early Childhood Leadership working with the directors who participate in *Taking Charge of Change*. Over the past four years, she has counseled and guided many directors in their plans for improving the quality of their early childhood programs. Jill is also the advocacy chairperson for her local directors' group. Her most recent activity was sponsoring a media forum to address issues around child care subsidies.

Jill's professional accomplishments and her ability to sustain high quality programming in the world of for-profit child care provide strong evidence of her commitment, creativity, and business acumen.

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Learning the Ropes – The Job Socialization of Directors

By Paula Jorde Bloom

A few months ago as part of a study I am conducting on directors' role perceptions, I interviewed a young woman named Deborah who had recently been hired as the director of a large child care center. Her center is part of an established social service agency. In her new role, Deborah functions as a "middle manager" – she supervises a staff of 30 and reports to the agency's director of educational programs.

When I asked Deborah how she would characterize her first six months on the job, she replied, "This has been a slow process of learning what ropes to pull and what ropes to jump." Her remark got me thinking about how directors are socialized into their jobs, particularly when they are caught in the middle, being tugged by demands from above as well as below.

Job socialization describes how individuals adapt to their roles – how they act on their beliefs and values and adapt to the beliefs and values of others. As directors mature in professional competence, the kinds of social strategies they use to conform to different organizational and institutional demands goes through a subtle transformation. I believe four stages describe the thought patterns and belief systems of directors who work in an organizational context where they are "middle managers" reporting to a corporate office, a board of directors, or an agency executive director.

Blind compliance is when a director will comply with an authority figure's definition of a situation and believe this conformity to be for the best. Individuals at this stage are willing to develop into the kind of person the situation demands. Listen to Connie as she reflects on her career. She states,

When I first began as director, the agency CEO installed a punch clock for employees. He said it was necessary to keep people honest. He also suggested I prohibit teachers from using the office telephone and instead make them use the pay phone in the building next door if they wanted to make an outgoing call. I never questioned the wisdom of his suggestions. I just assumed his management philosophy was correct; after all, he was so much older and more experienced than I was. Now I look back and laugh. I was such an amoeba then – so obedient and compliant.

Uncomfortable compliance is when the director will comply with the constraints posed by a situation but retain private reservations about doing so. Individuals at this stage do not act in ways consistent with their underlying beliefs; their outward conformity is an adaptive response without the corresponding personal value commitment.

Many of the ethical dilemmas directors face reflect this kind of response. For example, some directors will comply with the demands of a board or owner to cut corners on quality. They will over-enroll classes, deny staff their entitled breaks, and even limit purchases of basic supplies essential for program functioning. They comply because they are intimidated by their superiors or fearful of the consequences of insubordination. They know their actions don't match their beliefs, but

Continued on page 2

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Continued from front page

they comply nevertheless. As one director expressed in an interview,

I find myself purchasing more and more workbooks for the prekindergarten group because the parents want some tangible proof that their children are "learning" something at school. I don't really feel this is the best way for children to learn, but I want to keep the parents happy.

Working the system is when a director will make changes or maneuver around organizational constraints without the formal power to do so. Individuals in this responsive mode know how to cut through red tape and make things happen without being cast as a rebel. Letitia's story reflects this strategy.

My agency had this ridiculous rule that no one could be in the building unless the custodian was also on the premises. In fact, the custodian had the only key to the building. The rule was implemented primarily as a security measure. I know the intent was good, but it really conflicted with my work style. I like to do my paperwork after the center closes and occasionally I like to come in on weekends to redo the bulletin boards. I quickly learned how to get around the system. Once a week I bought pizza for the custodian. I also rented videos for him. Since he was a widower and had no one to go home to, the arrangement worked great. I got my work done; he got a free dinner and entertainment.

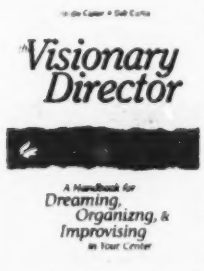
Redefining the system is when a director is able to educate or influence a supervisor, board, or agency executive director into adopting new ways of thinking about organizational issues and perceived constraints. These individuals are adept at advocating for needed changes to make their programs more efficient and effective.

Kathy, the director of a large United Way program, is one such director. Over the past few years as her program has grown, so too have the demands on her time. A year ago, Kathy realized that if she was to maintain the high quality of her program, she needed to hire an assistant director. Her agency's board, faced with other fiscal challenges, did not want to create a new position. In a non-adversarial way, Kathy was able to work with her board to come up with a creative win/win strategy to achieve her goal of increased staffing. She wrote a proposal and received a grant from a local corporation to buy educational materials. This freed up funds in the instructional supplies line item of her budget that she shifted to the personnel line item of her budget. She then persuaded her board to modify agency policy so she could rent out a large gym space to different community groups on the weekend. Together the income generated from these two strategies was sufficient for her board to fund the creation of a new assistant director position.

If the stages described in this article resonate with your own experience, I'd love to hear from you. Join our discussion group in the Time Out section of our web site (www.nl.edu/ceel) and share your story.

Paula Jorde Bloom, Ph.D., is Director of the Center for Early Childhood Leadership and Coordinator of the National-Louis University's Early Child Administration M.Ed./C.A.S. program.

Director's Bookshelf



The Visionary Director: A Handbook for Dreaming, Organizing, and Improvising in Your Center by Margie Carter and Deb Curtis (Redleaf Press, 1998). *Reviewed by Donna Rafanello.*

"If directors are to be successful and satisfied with their work, they not only need skills and expertise, but a way to get a handle on their jobs, and a replenishing source of nourishment for themselves."

So begins Margie Carter and Deb Curtis' new book for directors. It's more than a book; it's an experience of introspection, exploration, and renewal. Carter and Curtis, in their characteristically whimsical and creative style, have created another valuable resource for directors.

In encouraging directors to focus not on how things are, but rather on a vision of how they could be, the authors offer directors inspiration for breathing new life into their programs, their communities, and themselves.

Have you ever made tear-water tea?

Do you know where to find zoysia plugs?

Have you ever stood in a fuss box?

These are but a few of the innovative strategies found in the pages of *The Visionary Director*. Infused with directors' stories, poetry, quotes, and creative ideas for staff meetings (and life), each chapter offers a fresh perspective on the role of the director. "View curriculum as everything that happens," they suggest. "View staff meetings as circle time." Carter and Curtis encourage directors to use their passion to create programs for children and families that fulfill their vision of what child care can be.

The book is written in six chapters. It begins, where the authors hope you will begin, by "describing what you see as the primary purpose of your work – searching your heart for what's important."

Chapter 1 offers a vision of early childhood programs as the new neighborhoods of the twenty-first century. Chapters 2 through 5 describe a triangular model of thinking of a director's role: Manager, Coach and Mentor, and Community Builder. Chapter 6 – Moving from Surviving to Thriving – advocates knowing yourself and acting on what you know. It presents strategies for getting active beyond your program and reshaping the community where your program resides. The *Visionary Director* also includes "snapshots" of promising initiatives around the country and sample forms for trying some the strategies described in the book.

The *Visionary Director* is available from Redleaf Press (800/423-8309) or Harvest Resources (Fax: 206/720-0494) for $25.95.

The Director's Toolbox

Tips for More Effective Meetings – Recording Ideas Encourages Participation

A good recorder with the right tools and skills can make meetings more effective by creating a "group memory." The recorder's job is to remain neutral and capture the key ideas of a meeting on large pieces of newsprint or white paper.

The group memory helps keep the group focused on issues being discussed and provides an instant record of what is decided and how it is decided. It is important, therefore, that the recorder remain non-defensive if members of the group ask for corrections.

Providing a group record also has other advantages:

- It frees participants from taking notes unless they really want to do so.
- It protects against individuals' blocking or monopolizing the discussion because after they see their ideas recorded, they can let go of them and move on to new ideas.
- It encourages greater participation because group members see their ideas are important enough to be recorded.
- It assists latecomers because they can read the group memory to see what they have missed.
- It reduces repetition in discussion.
- It creates a sense of accomplishment because participants can see the work they have done.

The newsprint notes can be labeled and stored for future reference, or can be transcribed and used in preparing minutes or a memo summarizing accomplishments of the meeting.

Some suggestions for the recorder:

✔ Write or print clearly, with letters large enough for everyone to read.

✔ Post newsprint so it is visible to everyone in the room.

✔ Use different colored felt-tipped markers to signify different points during the discussion and to highlight important decisions of the group. (Don't use yellow, orange, or red - they are difficult to read).

✔ Use a separate piece of paper to indicate items that have been suggested for the next meeting.

✔ Check for clarification and accuracy several times during the meeting.

Tip: If participants do not know one another, the recorder can post a diagram of the seating arrangement with everyone's name to encourage the use of names during the meeting.

Source: National Staff Development Council (1994). School Team Innovator and Doyle, M., & Straus, D. (1976). How to Make Meetings Work.

Keeping Informed

Day Care Action Council Launches New Licensing Coalition

Working parents depend on the child care licensing system to know that their children will be as safe as possible when in the care of someone outside the home. When the child care licensing system is weak, children may be unduly exposed to harm. In Illinois, a growing number of professionals worry that the child care licensing system is weak – that licensing staff do not have the training or resources needed to effectively function.

The Licensing Coalition (TLC) was formed by the Day Care Action Council of Illinois to address these concerns. The goal of TLC is to advocate for a strong child care licensing system built on good standards that are consistently enforced. If you would like to learn more about The Licensing Coalition, call 773-562-8887 or e-mail the Day Care Action Council at dcacadv@interaccess.com.

Illinois Director Credential Work Groups Established

The Illinois Director Credential puzzle is beginning to take shape with over 100 early childhood professionals from across the state actively engaged in the development of the credential and the system that will support it. Meeting as often as monthly, each of the four Work Groups – Competencies, Systems, Accessibility, and Public Relations – is deliberating the difficult issue of how to create a credential that is a "standard of management and leadership" while allowing flexibility in access to the credential itself.

The work groups are wrestling with important questions: Will experience as a director be required prior to applying for the credential? Should Level One be at or above licensing standards? How many hours of formal course work will be required? What are the necessary competencies for each of the three proposed levels of the credential? Who will deliver the training and in what format? How will training be tracked and who will monitor the progress of the candidates?

These are the questions for which the work group members and Management Committee are currently seeking answers. Credential projects from other states are being studied as possible models for Illinois as members address the many issues that will make the credential a reality by the year 2000. In the next few months, the credential will start to take shape as the questions are answered and pieces of the credential puzzle are put together.

Look for presentations on the Illinois Director Credential at conferences this fall. Anyone interested in active participation in the project or interested in reviewing materials is encouraged to contact the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) office. Presentations are also available to groups or professional associations. For additional information contact Valerie Dawkins, Project Coordinator at INCCRRA, 207 West Jefferson, Suite 503, Bloomington, Illinois 61701, phone 309-829-5327 or email inccrra@ice.net.

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New Resources

Model Work Standards for Teaching Staff in Center-Based Care

Published by the Center for the Child Care Workforce, this is an excellent tool for any director interested in improving the quality of work life for staff. Model Work Standards includes recommended provisions on wages and benefits, time off, job descriptions and evaluations, hiring and promotions, grievance procedures, professional development, supervision, decision-making, communication, diversity, the physical setting, health and safety, and professional support.

Available from the Center for the Child Care Workforce (202) 737-7700. $10.

The Accreditation Corner

The 1998 Revised Edition of Guide to Accreditation

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's accreditation system has been in operation since 1985. This year the Guide to Accreditation underwent its second major revision. This latest revision reflects the Academy's experience administering the system and the input of early childhood professionals across the country who continue to collaborate with the Association to ensure that standards reflect current research and practice.

A Brief Overview

- The overall design of the Guide was made more user-friendly with highlighted chapter headings. Key points and chapter summaries have been framed for emphasis. A graphic flowchart has been created to give the reader an overall view of the self-study process.
- Criteria relating to technology have been updated to include suggestions for Internet-based resources. In addition, greater detail has been added to clarify the distinction between *active* and *passive* media.
- Recognizing that there are many variations of relationships between adults and children living together, the term *parent* has been replaced with *family*. The Family Questionnaire, formally the Parent Questionnaire (with 16 questions), poses 25 statements reflecting thoughtful emphasis on positive center/family communications.
- The term *staff* has been expanded to read *teachers/teaching staff* and is further defined as *paid adults who have direct responsibility for the care and education of young children*. New criteria in the Teaching-Staff Questionnaire reflect the personal needs of teachers.
- Expanded services offered in child care programs have led to the distinction between *preschoolers* and (a new grouping) *kindergartners – children who are attending public or private kindergarten, usually 5-year-olds*. Criteria specific to this group have been added to the Early Childhood Classroom Observation chapter of the Guide to Accreditation and are found within the "Interactions among Teachers and Children" and "Curriculum" sections.

The importance of recognizing, respecting, and valuing differences found in individuals, families, and cultures are reflected throughout the revised Guide.

- Added to criterion A-3b, Interactions about Teachers and Children: "Teachers talk with individual children, and encourage children of all ages to use language," is this example: *Talk positively about family members, family events, traditions, and routines.*
- In criterion A-4a, "Teachers treat children of all races, religions, family backgrounds, and cultures with equal respect and consideration" is this added example: *Teachers make it a firm rule that a person's identity (age, race, ethnicity, family life, physical appearance, and ability) is never used to tease or reject anyone.*
- In criterion A-5, "Teachers encourage children's development of independent functioning, as appropriate...", this caution is added, *Cultural perspectives of family or community may influence expectations for independence.*

The revised Guide reflects sensitivity to the challenges that programs located in troubled neighborhoods face achieving certain accreditation criteria.

- Criterion G-9b: "The outdoor play area is protected from access to streets and other dangers by fences or by natural barriers" has this added statement, *Programs need to exercise professional judgment in situations where community conditions of violence or extreme weather threaten children's health or safety. If conditions for outdoor play are not safe, the program should provide regular, alternative activities to meet children's need for fresh air and exercise.*

Finally, an additional health/safety criteria has been added:

- *Criterion H-14d: Staff and volunteers follow universal precautions to prevent transmission of blood-borne diseases.*

A careful examination of the 300-page 1998 edition of the Guide to Accreditation is important for early childhood directors working in both accredited and not yet accredited programs. In the most current edition, the Academy has presented combined wisdom of best practices.

Family Friendly Practices

Lincoln Park Cooperative Nursery School

Lincoln Park Cooperative Nursery School was incorporated as a non-profit agency in 1951. The school is situated on a quiet, one-way, tree-lined street on the near north side of Chicago in a 100-year-old building that once housed a stable. Lincoln Park Cooperative Nursery School serves 80 children, ages 2fi to 5 years in half-day programs. The school has a long-standing reputation within the community of offering high quality, distinctive programming for children. The Coop's director since 1984 is Judy Keller.

"By the very definition of our charter, Lincoln Park Cooperative's strength is its family friendly practices," states Judy. "Our Board of Directors are parents of currently enrolled children. Parents must volunteer once a month in the classroom. We are proud of the fact that we have fathers in the classroom 40% of the time. In addition, every family must serve on a committee: building and renovations, fundraising, education, membership/enrollment, social/public relations or scholarship."

Because applications far exceed enrollment capacity, children are selected into the Coop's classes by lottery. Parents and children are welcomed into the school's culture immediately upon acceptance. "Strong, supportive communication between home and school begins with the teacher's initial home visit," says Judy. "We have a gradual orientation process, taking up to two weeks, to ease the separation process." Parents needing added reassurance are welcome to remain in the classroom, parent lounge, or assist in the school office or library.

A weekly school newsletter is sent home to parents informing them of upcoming events, detailing classroom activities, and offering child development or parenting topics of current interest. Formal parent-teacher conferences are held twice a year. "Because our children go on to a variety of private, public and parochial elementary schools, the teachers' role in supporting parents as they select an appropriate kindergarten is crucial," states Judy.

While parent cooperative nursery schools are a dying breed in this country, Lincoln Park Cooperative Nursery School remains a shining example of how programs can be structured to partner with families in the education of children.

Director's Profile

Marcia Orr An Advocate for Families

Marcia Orr is the Home/School Coordinator of the Project Early Start Early Childhood Program and Executive Director of BASE, a before- and after-school program housed in Illinois School in District #162. Marcia's professional profile exemplifies the dual role that educators often play as teacher and advocate.

After receiving her B.S. from St. Xavier University, Marcia taught second grade. As a teacher, she saw the critical need for before- and after-school care for young school-aged children. Marcia's advocacy skills generated support from the superintendent of District #162. She successfully launched BASE, a before- and after-school program for the children in that district. It was during that time that Marcia's energies found a focus that drive her to this day: "I realized that to support the well-being of children, I needed to become an advocate for families."

Today, BASE is an NAEYC-accredited program serving 70 children from Chicago's south suburban communities. Morning and afternoon programs are filled with preschoolers through third grade children. This year, special needs children are being welcomed into full-day programs. "The staff have created an exemplary environment and curriculum for young children," states Marcia. They have the autonomy to plan their day and order their own materials. Last year, in order to better meet the needs of our expanding second and third grade classrooms, we redefined interest areas. Computers, additional library materials, a piano, and more diversified arts and crafts projects were added. The children take part in a wide range of activities including knitting, crocheting, model kit building, and science experiments."

Marcia's office in Illinois School doubles as the Parent Center, an inviting place for parents to gather, talk about their needs, and develop relationships with their children's teachers. Marcia has created a Parent Resource Center making books, videos, and activity bags available to families. She has also played a lead role in coordinating the district's Parent Institute.

In 1996, Marcia's advocacy initiatives took an interesting twist. She helped organize the South Suburban Small Business Association (SSSBA) in an effort to make the business community more aware of educational issues and concerns. Currently, she serves as Vice-Chair of Membership for this 167-member organization. While the SSSBA provides a strong political voice for its members, Marcia works to support the educational needs of its members' employees. "Education is the link between healthy families and sound, positive relationships with our schools," states Marcia.

With funding from the Illinois Department of Human Services and continued support from District #162, Marcia looks forward to building an enrichment center in Park Forest to accommodate 140 children, infants to age 12. She envisions a space for children and families that will house classrooms, an art studio and gallery, practice rooms for music lessons, an expanded lending library and resource center, and of course, a gathering space for parents.

In 1995, Marcia was selected as a McCormick Fellow and received her M.Ed. in Early Childhood Leadership and Advocacy from National-Louis University in 1997. She has served as a mentor for the Center for Early Childhood Leadership working with directors who participate in *Taking Charge of Change*. She is also a validator for NAEYC accreditation. Most recently, Marcia co-authored an article in Elementary School Journal, "Special Needs Children Make the Transition to Kindergarten."

Marcia's commitment to supporting quality programs that strengthen families through collaboration with business and school communities serves as a powerful model for early childhood directors.

Grant$ Update

The Center Receives Grant for Preschool Science Training

The Center for Early Childhood Leadership has received a $40,500 grant from the American Business Collaboration for Quality Dependent Care (ABC) to support directors in their role as supervisors of teachers and to improve the quality of curricular practices in the area of science education. Fifteen directors along with two head teachers from each of their centers will attend the preschool science training program at National-Louis University. Follow-up site visits and technical assistance will be given as needed. Preschool science kits valued at $1,000 will be awarded and additional assistance will be given to directors in writing a $400 mini-grant to support their efforts at implementing developmentally appropriate science experiences for the children in their care.

The ABC grant is administrered by Work/Family Directions of Boston. Contributing corporations were Allstate Insurance, Citibank, Hewlett-Packard, Lucent Technologies, Xerox, AT&T, Deloitte & Touche, IBM, and Price Waterhouse.

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The Director's Link

Published by the Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National-Louis University **Winter, 1999**

Supporting the Language Development of Infants and Toddlers:

An Important Topic for Staff Development

By Joan Britz

One of the most important responsibilities (and challenges) of early childhood teachers and caregivers is to promote the development of language skills in young children. Directors can affirm and lead staffs' efforts in this area by providing a supportive environment where children's language skills are celebrated and enjoyed. How does a director promote a "language-rich" environment? Let's explore some ideas together.

If teachers are to maximize opportunities for children's language development, it is essential that they understand the developmental stages of children's language, the importance of play in acquiring language, and the vital role they have in partnering with parents to promote good communication skills in young children. Directors can nurture teachers' increasing competence by role modeling appropriate behaviors, emphasizing the importance of guided observation, making available articles, books, and videotapes, and scheduling in-service training on topics relating to language development.

Building a Professional Library

Collecting books, pamphlets, and articles that discuss and support good communication skills is an easy way to begin your focus on language. Ask staff to be on the lookout for information that can be added to the library. Make multiple copies of your favorites and organize them in clearly labeled age-level folders.

On a regular basis, use articles as a springboard for discussion at staff meetings. With new or inexperienced teachers, you will probably want to give them a few questions to think about as they read the article. Also, be sure to post copies of selected articles on your parent board and include information in your center's newsletter. It is your job as the curriculum leader to keep the focus on language until everyone is thinking *"language development"* each and every day.

Some good resources for articles are Young Children, PreK Today, and Child Care Information Exchange. Don't forget to include references to the language sections in NAEYC's 1997 publication Developmentally Appropriate Practice (pages 70-71). I recently used part of an article in the Oct/Nov 1998 issue of Parent & Child with a group of toddler teachers and parents. The article was well organized by age ranges. (Call 1-800-631-1586 for ordering information.) Remember, you can't consider language development without also including the other communication skills of listening, reading, and writing.

Using videotapes can be an excellent way to help staff acquire new knowledge, review important concepts, and stimulate discussion about important language-related topics. Showing videos can be done in small groups, work teams, or even with learning partners. One of the nice features about using a video for training is that you can stop it and discuss it at any time. This is an excellent way to individualize your staff development.

As videos become less expensive, the incentive to add them to your professional library increases. Given the high staff turnover many programs experience, establishing a video library makes good sense. An added plus to building your own video library is that parents can also check out videos. This will increase their knowledge of language development and strengthen relationships with them.

To receive full benefit from each video, be sure to preview it yourself and read any

Continued on page 2

Continued from front page 1

supplemental material supplied by the producer. Jot down notes, questions, and current applications that would be appropriate as a training focus for your program. Keep your notes with the video so that you won't have to "start from scratch" the next time you want to use it. You may want to keep professional articles that support the video in a folder nearby.

My "hot pick" for a video on language acquisition and children's developmental stages is a video titled, *Let's Talk About It*. This half-hour video is part of a new child care training series. ($24.95 from the Annenberg/CPB Multimedia Collection, 1-800-LEARNER.) I recently piloted it at a training of new licensing representatives.

Another excellent video is *Child Development: The First Three Years*. ($19.98 from Special Interest Productions, 1-212-674-5550.) Although this video is geared more toward parents, it provides easy-to-understand information on basic language stages.

Observing Language Learning During Play

Play offers the best opportunity for the spontaneous child-adult interactions that increase a child's communication capacity. Reviewing observation techniques with teachers will encourage them to look and listen closely to each child. By assessing the developmental level of the child, teachers are better able to help move the child forward to the next level of language development.

Generally, infants begin expressive language with cooing. Babbling soon follows as the child is introduced to "motherese," that high-pitched, simple sentence, and repetitive style of talking to a baby used by caregivers and parents. By age one, many infants use a few words repeatedly. Most have only one meaning such as "baba" for bottle.

Between one and two years of age, toddlers' vocabulary increases remarkably. They are now able to use language for social interactions such as "bye-bye" with a gesture and verbalize two-word sentences. By urging teachers to observe closely the language skills of young children, you are helping them to better support language development. Stress with your teachers that the strongest single predictor of a child's vocabulary capacity is the sheer amount of verbal interaction the child is exposed to. Encourage them to talk, talk, talk to the infants and toddlers in their care.

You'll find a wonderful resource for language building strategies to use with infants and toddlers is the *Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers*. Check out their web site (www.pitc.org).

Parent Partnerships

The director plays a key role in promoting partnerships with parents. Be sure that your teachers' daily communications with parents include notes about language accomplishments. Also, provide parents with a way to report their child's newly acquired language skills to caregivers and celebrate the individual language accomplishments of each child. Support parents' increased learning with articles and conversations about language development.

I hope the suggestions I've provided in this article will help you transform your program into a "language rich" learning environment for the youngest children in your care. Think of a renewed focus on children's language skills as a leadership opportunity—a chance for you to deepen the knowledge and skill base of your staff and impact the growth and development of the children in your program.

The Director's Link is distributed free of charge to early childhood directors in Illinois. If you have received more than one copy of this newsletter, please pass it along to a colleague. Address corrections should be directed to:

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Joan Britz, Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at National-Louis University, teaches courses in speech and language development, the administration of early childhood programs, and parent relations. She is the author of several early childhood books and publications.

The Director's Toolbox

Tips for More Effective Meetings

Thinking About Your Role as Convener

As director of your center, you are probably the person responsible for convening staff meetings and compiling the agenda. You may not have thought your role as convener was all that important, but in fact, the success of a meeting is often determined well before members actually take their seats and the meeting begins. How you prepare for your meeting can make all the difference in how effective you will be in achieving the desired outcomes. In this Director's Toolbox we provide some thought-provoking questions for you to consider as you plan your next meeting.

✔ Are you clear in your own mind about what you want to accomplish in your meeting? Will your meeting serve as a forum for staff development, an opportunity to build staff collegiality, a time to communicate essential information, or just a time to vent frustrations? Knowing your broader goals and purposes for conducting a meeting is the first step to setting the stage for collaboration and shared expectations.

✔ Does your agenda reflect the input of your staff? Solicit potential agenda items from your staff a week or two prior to your meeting. Find out what issues they would like to have discussed. This not only communicates your respect for them as valued partners, but it helps ensure their active participation in the meeting itself.

✔ Does your agenda reflect only substantive issues that merit the group's getting together? Meetings often consume enormous chunks of time on topics that could as easily have been covered in a memo. Don't waste your staff's precious time on trivial matters!

✔ Have you considered carefully who should attend the meeting? Your staff does not want to sit through a discussion that has little relevance to their work. Make sure to include only those individuals who will benefit from the information or discussion. You may even want to consider having some individuals attend only part of a meeting and allowing them to leave at a mutually agreed upon point in the agenda.

✔ Have you distributed the agenda to your staff several days before the meeting? To ensure that your staff comes prepared, you will probably also want to send a cover memo and attachments—any handouts, articles, or briefing items that they should read prior to the meeting.

✔ Have you set a realistic time frame for discussing the items included on your agenda? Most meetings suffer from topic overload. Anticipating the level of interest and time needed to adequately cover an item is tricky. Some directors find it helpful to pose a series of questions next to each agenda item to get staff thinking in advance. This can help expedite the discussion.

✔ Have you made arrangements for food and room set-up? If the meeting is to be held when the center is open, have you arranged for adequate supervision of the children and coverage of the telephone? Making sure the climate is conducive to meeting will help focus attention where it should be—on the topics to be discussed.

Linking to Technology

The Director's Link and *Research Notes* are Now On-line

Two of the Center for Early Childhood Leadership's publications, *The Director's Link* and *Research Notes*, now can be viewed on-line. These new sections of the Center's web site will also enable browsers to access all previous issues of each publication.

To view these publications on-line, log onto the Center's web site (www.nl.edu/cecl). From the home page, click either the *Director's Link* button or the *Research Notes* button to access these sections of the web site. Within each section, click the button that indicates the season and year of the issue you are interested in. The Center encourages you to stay "in touch" by visiting these sections of our web site on a regular basis.

Early Childhood Administration M.Ed./C.A.S. Available On-line

NLU's new graduate program in Early Childhood Administration will be available on-line beginning Spring term, 1999. Now early childhood professionals who live outside the Chicago metropolitan area have access to leadership and management coursework leading to a master's degree or certificate of advanced study.

Presented in a high-tech/high-touch format, some courses will be delivered entirely on-line; others will be offered so that students attend an intensive weekend or week-long institute on NLU's Wheeling campus. The program is premised on the belief that training should be offered in formats that are convenient for professionals who live a distance from campus, yet still provide opportunities for intense and enriching face-to-face exchanges with professors and fellow students.

For additional information about this graduate program, call 1-800-443-5522, ext. 5208.

Planning Ahead

Professional Development Opportunities

January 22, 1999
Directors' Suite Talk
The Center for Early Childhood Leadership will host a suite talk and reception from 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. on Friday, January 22, 1999 during the Chicago Metro AEYC conference at the Chicago Hilton and Towers Hotel. Come learn more about professional development opportunities offered by the Center.

March 6, 1999
Grantswriting Institute
Planning for a Secure Future in a Changing Climate is the theme of the Center's first annual grantswriting institute for early childhood professionals. Presented by Dr. Chip Donohue, this institute will offer practical ideas about funding sources, current national and state initiatives, components of an effective grant proposal, and grantswriting and fundraising resources for directors.

Saturday, March 6, 1999
8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

National-Louis University
1000 Capitol Drive
Wheeling, Illinois 60090

Registration: $75 includes continental breakfast, lunch, and institute materials.

Individuals may receive 2 semester hours of non-resident graduate credit by participating in a follow-up individualized grantswriting clinic either on-line or in-person. Tuition is $398.

May 1, 1999
Advocacy Institute
Advocating for Children with Special Needs is the focus of the Center's second annual Advocacy Institute. This one-day event will address the challenges directors face as they meet the mandate for full inclusion. Topics will include: understanding the state and federal guidelines for full inclusion; creating appropriate classroom settings; supporting the professional development of teachers; supporting the needs of families; and making connections with community agencies.

Saturday, May 1, 1999
8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Lisle/Naperville Hilton
3003 Corporate West Drive
Lisle, Illinois 60522

Registration: $30 includes continental breakfast, workshop sessions, lunch, and handouts.

Individuals may register on-site for 2 semester hours of non-resident graduate credit and attend additional sessions on Saturday evening, Sunday morning, and one additional weekend. Tuition is $398.

July 11-17, 1999
Taking Charge of Change
The Center for Early Childhood Leadership will conduct its seventh annual *Taking Charge of Change* summer institute for directors of early childhood programs. This leadership training focuses on the nature of individual, organizational, and systemic change and the director's role as change agent.

For information about these professional development opportunities, contact Eileen Eisenberg, 1-800-443-5522, ext. 5252.

Research in Review

New Report on Child Care

The Illinois Department of Human Services has published its 1997 Report on Illinois Child Care. The report summarizes data gathered from the Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) database and a salary and staffing survey of Illinois child care providers. It also documents changes since 1992—the last year for which the state published a child care report. Here is a summary of key findings:

Child Care Needs of Families
- Infant care represented the largest group for whom families calling CCR&Rs sought care.
- Between 1992 and 1997, requests for school-age children increased more than for any other age group.
- Requests for non-traditional schedules (evening, overnight, and weekend care) increased significantly over the five years.

Salary and Staffing in Centers
- Directors reported a decline in the qualifications of their staff over a five-year period.
- Turnover rates for all staff increased between 1992 and 1997, especially for assistant teachers and school-age program staff. 1997 turnover figures (for a two-year period) were 43% for teachers, 69% for assistant teachers, and 56% for school-age staff.
- Directors reported that it took longer to fill teaching vacancies than had been the case previously.
- Salaries of all center personnel increased over the five-year period. However, these remained low, particularly in relation to wages of others. Starting hourly wages for teachers rose from $6.10 to $7.40. Assistant teachers' starting wages rose from $4.90 to $5.90.

Child Care Center Administration
- Ninety-two percent of the centers surveyed responded that they employed a director with education beyond that required by licensing standards.
- Although licensing standards do not require a college degree for directors, about 90% of directors hold two- or four-year degrees.
- Turnover of directors declined slightly between 1992 and 1997 from 30% to 24%.
- Starting hourly wages for directors rose from $9.60 to $11.00 (an increase of 15% between 1992 and 1997).

For a full copy of the report, call: (312) 793-3610.

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The Accreditation Corner

Supporting Language Development in Infants

The most influential factor in the language development of an infant is a responsive and supportive caregiver—an enormous commitment for professionals in center-based programs to assume. Language is enhanced when an infant's needs are met with confidence, competence, and individualized connections. As the distinctive culture of each family molds an infant's journey in becoming an effective communicator, it remains a challenge for caregivers to model an environment that is consistent with those patterns of care.

The 1997 revised edition of NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs addresses the important role of relationships in every aspect of early development.

> Infants and toddlers develop expectations about people's behavior and about themselves based on how parents and others treat them. Through daily interactions with responsive, affectionate adults, babies experience their first positive love relationships. Trust and emotional security develop when infants learn that their needs are being met predictably and consistently. Self-confidence develops as babies and toddlers learn to communicate their needs and master challenges in their world. (p. 55)

Accreditation criteria reflect the key components of a model that promotes infant language development:

- A small group size—one caregiver to every three infants—allows for meaningful one-to-one interactions. In a small group, a caregiver can develop an intimate knowledge of an infant's temperament, needs, and cues.
- Consistency of one primary caregiver during the day promotes attachments and trust.
- Maintaining the same group of infants over a long period of time will provide feelings of safety and protection that encourage an infant to explore the environment.
- Adults speak in pleasant, calm voices, use simple language, and make frequent eye contact with infants.
- Adults hold and cuddle, observe and listen, and are responsive to infants' social and physical cues.
- Adults adjust to the infants' individual feeding and sleeping schedules and don't make the infants adjust to a predetermined, rigid schedule.
- Diaper changing, feeding, and other routines are viewed as vital learning experiences and healthy, accepting attitudes are expressed.
- Adults imitate babies' vocalizations and appreciate their cooing and babbling. Even crying is viewed as important, healthy, and essential. It is the way infants communicate their physical and emotional needs to their caregivers.
- During caregiving routines, the adult explains what will happen, what is happening, and what will happen next.
- Adults sing, talk, and read frequently with infants.
- The rhythms of the day provide balance between quiet and active activity.
- Adults respect infants' individual abilities and respond positively to each new achievement.
- Adults cope with stress and model the types of interactions with others they want the children in their care to develop.

Caregiving for infants carries enormous responsibilities; creating a responsive and loving environment reaps boundless rewards.

"Child care isn't hard—unless you're doing it right."

Rebecca Christian,
free lance writer,
Des Moines, Iowa

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Family Friendly Practices

NICASA Women and Children's Center

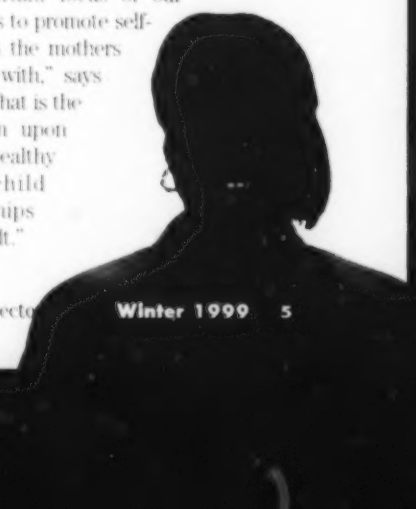
The Northern Illinois Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (NICASA) Women and Children's Center is a not-for-profit community-based agency founded in 1966. NICASA's North Chicago site provides intensive day treatment for substance-abusing women and child care services for their dependents. Three programs serve infants and toddlers, preschool through school-agers, and teens.

"Our Parent Empowerment Program focuses on modeling appropriate interactions between mothers and their children," states Debra Jones, NICASA's Child Care Supervisor. "Our program offers individualized assessment and treatment plans for families. Staff teach our clients the skills they need to nourish and support their child's emotional, physical, and cognitive development."

Because the majority of the women in NICASA's Women and Children's Center have been substance abusers prior to and after giving birth to their babies and/or have lost custody of their children, they have had limited opportunities to learn essential parenting skills. In the infant and toddler program, staff focus on teaching mothers how to hold, feed, play, talk, and read to their children.

"Our Parent Empowerment Program addresses issues of discipline, setting limits, toilet training, temper tantrums, and single parenting. We use every experience as an occasion to nourish healthy relationships between mothers and their children," reports Debra. Field trips to the zoo, museums, and plays are planned to encourage positive interactions between family members in public places.

NICASA's Women and Children's Center also offers its clients a full range of medical services, GED classes, and transportation to shopping and court appointments. "An important focus of our program is to promote self-respect in the mothers we work with," says Debra. "That is the foundation upon which healthy parent-child relationships can be built."



Director's Profile

Mary Ellen Bleeden A Master at Building Public-Private Partnerships

Mary Ellen Bleeden is Director of Early Childhood Programs for the Des Plaines Public School District #62. She administers the district's tuition-based, parent-funded programs, the SPARK Program (Special Programs Arranged Regarding Kids), and several grant-funded programs including Bright Start and Learning Links.

The scope of Mary Ellen's administrative responsibilities is enormous. Her NAEYC-accredited early childhood programs reach 400 children in before- and after-school child care, 180 kindergarten children, 150 preschoolers, and 120 children in state at-risk STAR and bilingual programs. Mary Ellen supervises a staff of 77 highly talented professionals housed in nine buildings.

Mary Ellen's administrative style embodies her positive enthusiasm and reflects her philosophy that every child has a right to develop to his/her fullest potential and will succeed if given the support of a caring adult. "All of our programs include the wrap-around parent component," states Mary Ellen. "We know from experience that kids cannot make it alone and it is our job to create programs to give parents the skills to help their children succeed."

Mary Ellen received her B.A. in Elementary Education from Northern Illinois and her M.A. in School Administration from Northeastern Illinois University. She began working with SPARK in 1983 with 30 children and 4 part-time teachers. As the program grew, Mary Ellen reached out to form public-private partnerships that would expand the availability of community resources to meet the needs of the district's families.

Public-private partnerships are one of the defining characteristics of Districts #62's model early childhood programs. Holy Family Hospital welcomes SPARK's participation in its prenatal classes and offers physical examinations for preschoolers in Mary Ellen's programs. Parents and children participate in toy-making classes held at Genesis, a Hispanic Empowerment Clinic that is a division of Lutheran General Hospital. Learning Links, a toy lending library based out of the district's early childhood center, provides high quality, literacy-based, theme boxes of materials for families. Once a month, SPARK hosts a parent/child activity evening offering ideas on how to use these boxes.

Another hospital/library collaboration, Bright Start, was created for parents and their infants and toddlers to underscore the positive impact of talking and reading to young children. Recently, home visits have been added to Bright Start's agenda to provide that extrapersonal link to new families.

Assisting parents with their continuing education has been an important focus of Mary Ellen's work. Each year, her programs assist families in a wide range of activities from voter registration to helping them obtain library cards. Parents can ride the school bus with their children and attend ESL classes, learn about nutrition, or improve their financial management skills.

Ready Here I Come, a five-week summer program was created for parents to learn about the American school system and steps to help their five-year-olds successfully transition to kindergarten. Parents are coached in understanding "school lingo" and how to manage bus schedules, homework, and parent/teacher conferences. They also learn about the importance of regular attendance, healthful meals, and proper bedtimes for their children. "We have gained momentum and have seen so many positive changes. Our programs are definitely making a difference," says Mary Ellen.

Keeping Informed

The Illinois Director Credential Goes Public

The Illinois Director Credential is rapidly taking shape as the project prepares to "go public" with the most recent efforts of the Competencies, Systems, Accessibility and Affordability, and Public Relations Work Groups. Members of the Work Groups have drafted components, processes, and system support for the Illinois Director Credential. Their work will be reviewed in a period of public comment. Presented will be a draft version of the two proposed routes for obtaining the credential, competency components, knowledge and skill areas for both management and early childhood training, and details about the application process. A public comment session will be held at the Chicago Metro AEYC conference, January 22, from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m.

All early childhood and school-age professionals, governing board members, policymakers and professional association members are encouraged to participate in the review process. Written, faxed or e-mailed responses will be accepted in addition to comments shared at the Chicago Metro AEYC Conference public comment session.

While the drafts and the review of current work are signs of tremendous progress in our "Piecing the Puzzle" endeavor, there are many more pieces to fit together. Each of the Work Groups continues to meet every 4 to 8 weeks. The strength of the Illinois Director Credential is the representation and commitment of a very diverse group of professionals in our field from across Illinois. Your help will strengthen the project.

Work group meetings schedules and IDC informational packets are available from the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) Office. Contact Valerie Dawkins, Project Coordinator, Illinois Director Credential, by phone at 309-829-5327 or e-mail (inccrra@ice.net).

Information about the credential is also available on the Center for Early Childhood Leadership web page (www.nl.edu/cecl).